

Understanding and Breaking Free from Codependency

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Origin of the term “Codependency” – By the late 1970s codependency referred mostly to people whose lives became unmanageable living in a relationship with an addict. It soon became apparent that even when the individual was no longer in relationship with this person or the person was no longer using the substance, the individual found another troubled person and repeated the same behaviors they had learned and developed. The codependent person's identity and worth had become tied into fixing, saving, or rescuing another person.

Defining Codependency in the Current Culture:

*“The term codependency is now used to describe those who struggle with **overreliance and control issues** – even if they are not in a relationship with an unhealthy person. People who struggle with codependency live in a personal prison of stress and anxiety that monopolizes their thoughts and feelings. Often, their whole identity is tied up in adjusting to and trying to manage other people’s lives, opinions, and problems. . . . It creates problems. It’s a violation of love.” (When We Love Too Much: Escaping the Control of Codependency, booklet by Jeff Olson, Discovery Series)*

Biblically Speaking:

Codependency is a form of idolatry manifesting itself in people-pleasing and fear of man, often motivated by the inordinate desire to win the approval of people rather than the approval of God. (John 12:43). Instead of trusting God, individuals look to someone or something else to do for them what only God can do.

“Codependency always has some kind of relational idolatry tied to it. Typically, our relationships with people become more important than our relationship with God. . . Codependency involves the displacement of Jesus for another person.” Ellen Dykas (*“Anxiety and Relationships: Counseling People Who Struggle with Insecurity and Codependency”* teaching at CCEF Conference 2019)

As followers of Christ, we are commanded to bear one-another’s burdens, love one another, forgive one another, overlook an offense, turn the other cheek, and deny self. People may ask, “If I’m doing all these things, why am I burned out and unappreciated, while the person I’m helping isn’t getting any better?”, “How can I keep up?”, “Why do I sometimes feel resentful?”.

What is my motivation? Why am I doing what I’m doing? _____

How can I align my motivation with the Lord’s?

*1 Cor. 9: 23 (v. 19-23) The Apostle Paul became all things to all men,
for _____.*

*2 Cor. 5:9 So whether we are at home or away,
we make it our aim to _____.*

What does codependency look like?¹

The Caretaker:

This is not the caregiver who is needed by a seriously incapacitated person. Neither is the caretaker someone who helps those who are in need (1 Th. 5:14). If a friend is sick and you run an errand or watch her kids, this is not caretaking. Caretakers try to do for others what they could and should do for themselves. Caretakers over-anticipate what others need so that they can help. They seem to want problems to solve so that they can feel needed and in control.

The Rescuer:

This is not the courageous person who takes personal risks to help people in dire need. Rather, it is the one who bails others out of the consequences of poor choices. Rescuers enable rather than confront problems that others create. They cover for others' glaring mistakes. For example, a rescuer will work an extra job rather than confront a family member who consistently wastes money on drugs and gambling that is needed to pay bills. They'll do homework for intelligent but unmotivated teenagers. They control by picking up the pieces and minimizing the seriousness of the problem.

The Pleaser:

This is not the one who is trying to be considerate of the real needs and feelings of others. Instead, pleasers try to do or be what they think others want them to do or be. They are preoccupied with making others happy and not disappointing them. Pleasers readily agree with others so they will avoid confrontation. They control others by doing or saying almost anything to anyone anytime.

The Helpless Victim:

Everyone has weaknesses, but those who play the role of the helpless victim choose to be weak unnecessarily. They don't just want to be helped; they want to be taken care of. Unlike the caretaker, they need others to take care of them. They control others through weakness.

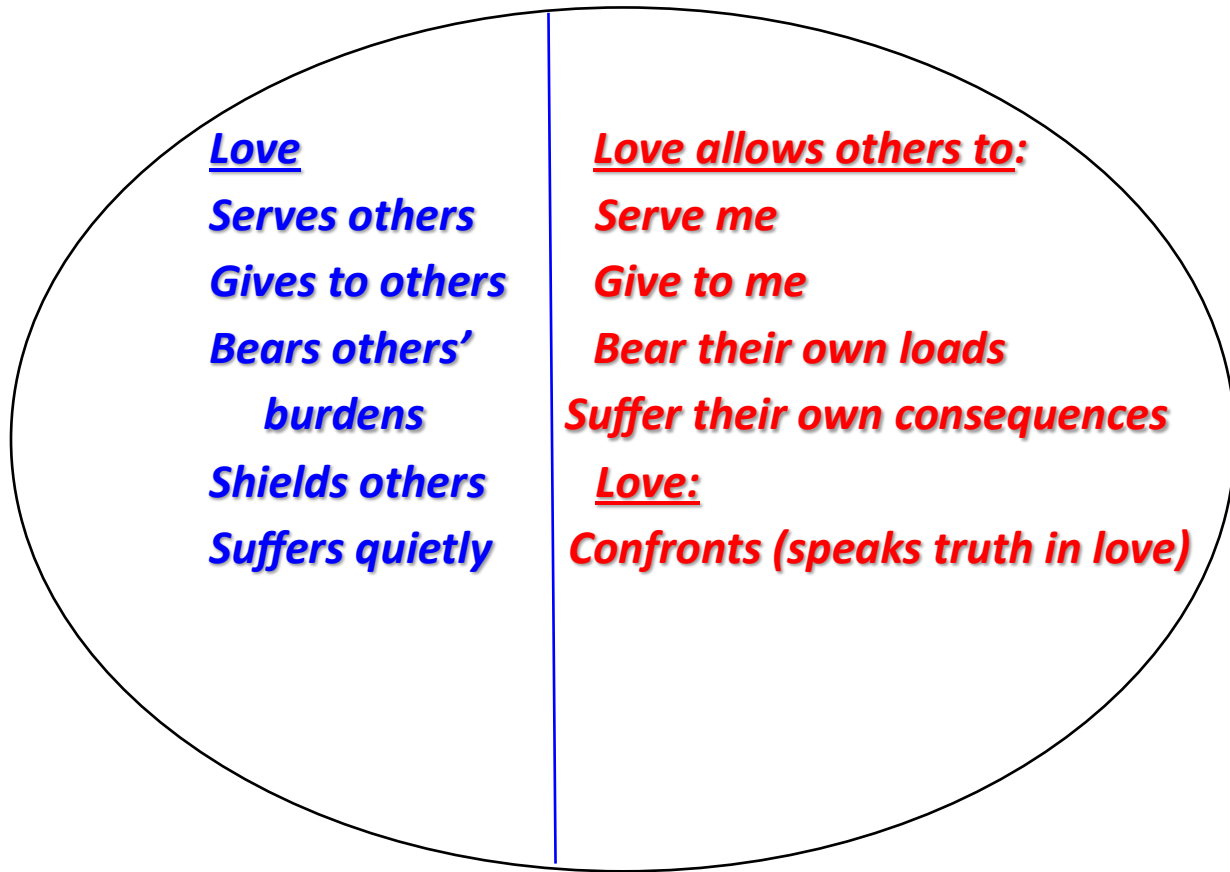
The Intimidator:

Families and churches need strong leaders, but they don't need leaders who intimidate and lord it over others (1 Pet. 5:3). That, however, is what intimidators do. They get things done—their way. Many are pushy, even without raising their voices. They leave the impression that they know it all. They use knowledge to control. They can be cordial and friendly as long as others agree with them. But when crossed, they turn mean. Some intimidators even go so far as to verbally and physically abuse those who dare to disagree with them. Behind the tough exterior, however, is an insecure heart that is terrified of losing control and being abandoned by the very people they intimidate.

¹ ¹ ("When We Love Too Much: Escaping the Control of Codependency", Jeff Olson, RBC Ministries, <http://discoveryseries.org/discovery-series/when-we-love-too-much-escaping-the-control-of-codependency>, p. 3-4)

Whole Counsel of God

(Dr. Virginia Stewart, ACBC & IABC Certified Biblical Counselor and Trainer)



Burden Bearing - Galatians 6:1 – 5

The Whole Counsel of God diagram

- v. 2 “*baros*” – heaviness, weight, burdensome, trouble; boulders too heavy to carry alone
- v. 5 “*phortion*” - a burden, load of the freight or cargo of a ship; diminutive (small, tiny, indicates smallness of, as in a book/et); also in Matt 11:30 “His yoke is easy and his burden is light.” Designed with the ability to carry the load.

Clarifying Responsibility diagram

- If we aren’t discerning well what is ours to carry, we can either become **irresponsible** or **over responsible**.
- Messiah complex - There is a difference between **being like Jesus** or **trying to Be Jesus**.

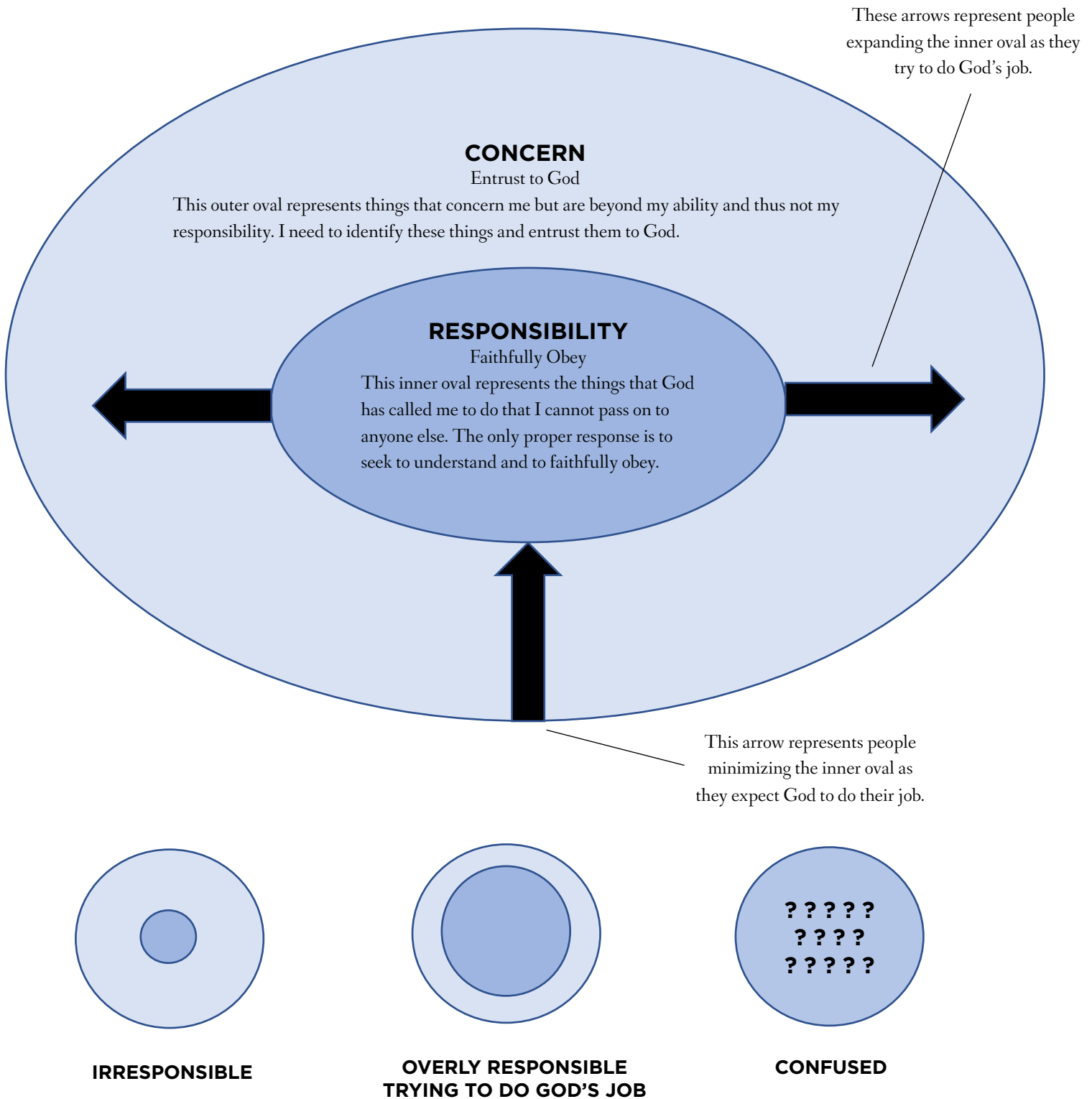
Clarifying Responsibility worksheet -Pray for wisdom to know what your responsibility is and isn’t. We will have greater peace as **accept our limitations, release trying to control, and learn to trust the Lord.**

Prov 29:25 – “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.”

Psalm 25:12 - 14 “Who is the man who fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way he should choose. His soul shall abide in well-being and his offspring shall inherit the land. The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.”

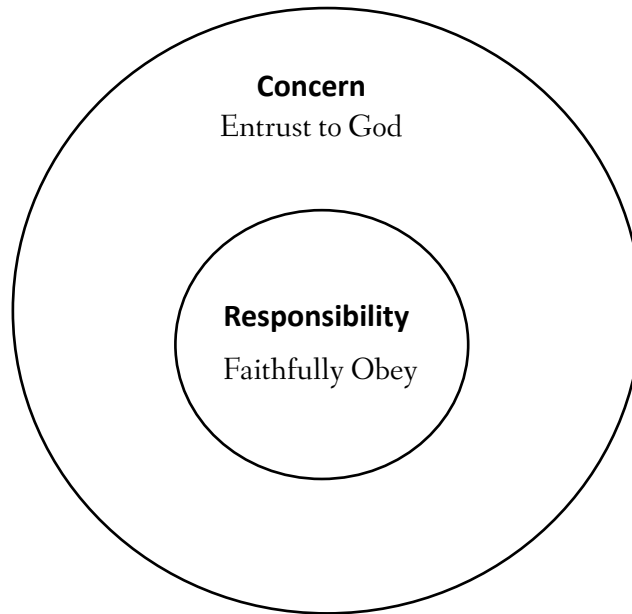
Psalm 27:14 “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the Lord!”

CLARIFYING RESPONSIBILITY²



² Tripp, Paul David, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*; P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ 2002, p. 250

CLARIFYING RESPONSIBILITY Worksheet



Things that are concerns in my life but are not my responsibility. These things I must entrust to God.

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

Things that are my God-ordained responsibility and, therefore, cannot be given to anyone else.

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

Changes that I need to make: _____

What is at the root of codependency?

1. Biblically speaking, codependency is people pleasing or the fear of man.

Prov. 29:25, Gal. 1:10 fear of man vs. fear of the Lord

John 3:30 -- I must decrease, He must increase.

John 12:42 – 43 (glory of man more than glory of God), 23-26 (follow Jesus)

What are my controlling desires? What am I afraid of losing?

Two sides of the coin – Desire for approval or _____

Fear of rejection or _____

2. We were created for community and relationships, love, acceptance, purpose, etc. But the Fall has distorted our desires causing us to be motivated to restore brokenness by what we can get from others, rather than from God making idols of being accepted or needed, or fixing and controlling.

3. We must be reoriented to the two greatest commandments (Mark 12:28-31).

God is restoring us to His intended purpose.

1. Let's look at how the Lord helped Peter grow from fear of man to bold fear of the Lord.

- Matthew 16:21-23 "But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things that God, but on the things of man.'" Matthew 26:31-35, 51-54, 69-75
- Luke 22:54-62 Peter denies Jesus out of fear.
- John 20:19 Behind closed doors for fear of the Jewish leaders. Jesus – "Peace be with you."
- Acts 2 - Day of Pentecost, received Holy Spirit – Boldly proclaims the gospel with no fear.
- Acts 5:27 -33; v. 29, to the high priest - "We must obey God rather than men."
- 1 and 2 Peter; 1 Peter 2:4 – "As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

2. We can grow in living the two greatest commandments (Matt 22:37 – 40).

- *Love God first, most, and always* -- Have intimacy with God. Abide in Him. Psalm 18:1 - 3; 16 – 19. He is our rock, fortress, deliverer, refuge. Bc He delights in us! Psalm 103 – all, esp. v. 11, 13, 17 "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love to those who fear him."
- *Love your neighbor as yourself* – in a God-glorifying, selfless way, as Jesus loves us. (Memorize and apply) *The Love Definition* by Dr. Virginia Stewart:

Love is: a commitment
 to do what is best for the other person long-term
 actively and sacrificially
 regardless of feelings
 without expectation of getting anything in return
 for the glory of God